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LOOKING BACK

*Two East European
Broadcasters
Gain Perspective on the Past*

■ THE JAYHAWK

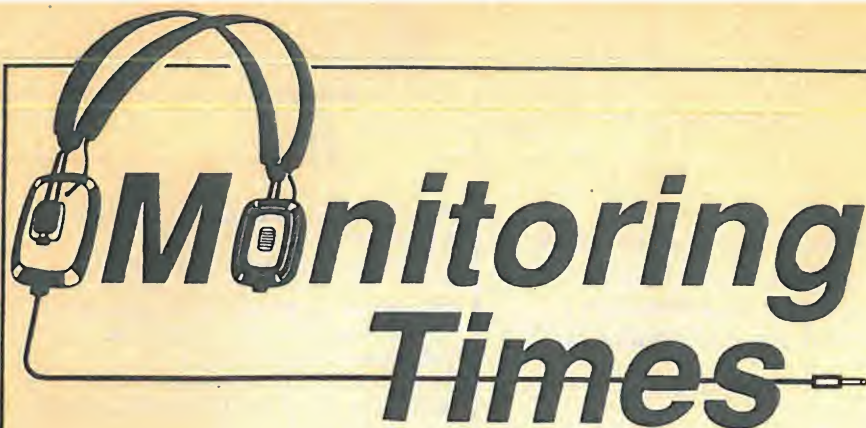
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Looking Back: An Eastern European Perspective 8

By Jeff Chanowitz

Two broadcasters—one from Romania and one from Hungary—share insights into what it has been like broadcasting from “both sides” of the Iron Curtain. Also, an American reports on his observations while teaching a broadcasting seminar in (then) Czechoslovakia.



The Jayhawks are Coming!

By Bill Battles

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This young upstart Coast Guard Search and Rescue helicopter may fly circles around old reliable HH-3F Pelicans, but it still needs some breaking in. In fact, the Jayhawk still needs an escort when more than 100 miles from shore. After you’ve tried to monitor the Jayhawk, you’ll understand why.



The Unique Story of TI4NRH

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By Don Moore

TI4NRH has earned its place in history as Latin America’s first shortwave broadcast station. But it’s more than that—here is the story of an insatiably curious and hard-working Costa Rican who won the hearts of all who encountered his pioneering and peaceable spirit.

COVER: A cablecar offers a tourist’s view of Romania. But to see the country from the perspective of a broadcaster, turn to page 8. Photo courtesy of Radio Romania.

Looking Back

Eastern Europeans Gain Perspective on the Past

By Jeff Chanowitz

During the cold war, many "iron curtain" services proliferated throughout the short-wave spectrum. With considerable financial backing from their respective governments, broadcasters such as Radio Berlin International, Radio Bucharest and Radio Prague provided programming ranging from outright propaganda to unique specialty features.

Nearly four years after the end of communism in Eastern Europe, these broadcasters have been dramatically transformed. *MT* talked with representatives from Radio Romania International and Radio Budapest to ask the question long on our minds: What is it like to have been a broadcaster under such divergent circumstances?



Romania

Radio Bucharest: The Communist Era

Being the chief of the English service and having worked during the Cold War

days as well as under the new style of programming, Fredrica Dochinoiu has a unique insight into the changes that have occurred within the Romanian external service. When she joined the service in 1965, Dochinoiu's background was largely in speaking and teaching English, with little knowledge of journalism. She explained, "The most important thing at that time was to be able to read English well and be able to translate quickly."

Radio Bucharest, as the service was known during the communist period, served largely as a propaganda tool of the government. Dochinoiu described the service's role as "making Romania known to the world...This policy was then expanded to making the policy of the Romanian Communist Party known." Dochinoiu described the first half of each Radio Bucharest broadcast as "sheer propaganda," with cultural, musical and youth features in the second half hour.

In addition to propaganda, the service's programming was also censored to ensure it was consistent with the communist party's dictates. Dochinoiu, whose job consisted of answering listener's letters and conducting interviews with foreigners visiting Romania, remarked, "If I went to do an interview with an American and they would say something not very commendable



Ceausescu quoted an old Romanian saying, "When the poplar tree grows pears, then will capitalism come back to Romania and oust communism." Hammer and sickle no longer grace this Romanian flag.

about the system or Ceausescu, it was cut out of the interview and not kept in the broadcast."

During the 1970s, Romania's communist dictatorship was transformed into a Stalinist personality cult centered around Nicolae Ceausescu, resulting in greatly increased censorship at Radio Bucharest. Dochinoiu recalled, "If a person asked about railways and the censors thought the figures were not up to international

standards or gave Romania a bad image, they were not mentioned." The censorship got to the point where, during the 1980s, "I was not allowed to write the power of our transmitters in a letter." Dochinoiu added, "This was unbelievable to me since that information was listed in the *World Radio and TV Handbook* at that time."

In 1968, Radio Bucharest started its *Listener's Club*, which continues to provide diplomas and

other station paraphernalia to club members to this day. Also during that time, Dochinoiu decided to start a weekly *DX Mailbag* which she continues to host. Being the only program on the air which was apolitical, the station management thought it was very odd to have a program that didn't mention Nicolae Ceausescu. The program included questions from listeners, reception reports and a 5-minute feature called Program for Radio Amateurs. Not long after its inception, *DX Mailbag* became one of the most popular features aired on Radio Bucharest.

Despite Dochinoiu's efforts, programming at Radio Bucharest became increasingly stale and burdened by reports focusing on Ceausescu's every movement, his thoughts being praised in every broadcast. Dochinoiu recalled that one Finnish listener, whose English was limited, accentuated this programming problem with a reception report that gave one-line 30-minute updates stating "man speak Ceausescu, woman speak Ceausescu."

Dochinoiu also mentioned a memorable letter an American listener wrote to the station complaining about its programming style. The listener wrote "You stated what Ceausescu did the whole day. I could not care less what he did." Dochinoiu commented, jokingly, "I could not care less" became the motto of the English department from then on."



The December 1989 Revolution

Yet, the incessant propaganda broadcast by Ceausescu on the domestic and international Romanian media could not fool the country's impoverished people, who were fed up with the rationing of food and electricity, along with brutal repression from the hated secret police. On December 21, 1989, the massacre of protesters in the provincial town of Timisoara—which the population knew about because of widely heard BBC broadcasts—resulted in Ceausescu being booed on live TV while giving a speech. During the turmoil of the resulting revolution, Radio Bucharest played a role in informing the international community about the changing situation within the country.

On December 22, after hearing about the shooting of student protestors in the center of Bucharest, Dochinoiu was surprised by signs in the streets put up by students stating "Down with Ceausescu." While she was waiting in line for bread before going to work, a woman came running, screaming with joy that "he had left"—meaning that Ceausescu was gone. Dochinoiu immediately rushed to the station. Reflecting on her emotions at the time, Dochinoiu remarked, "I was at a loss because I did not know what to do."

Because staff members thought that the secret police had probably cut the line to the stations transmitters anyway, it was decided that all news and programming would be replaced with Romanian folk music. The shortwave service's studios were located in the same building as the domestic radio, and crowds gathered outside the building demanding that communiques be read denouncing the regime. A few tense moments erupted outside when the crowd thought people inside the radio building

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supported the regime. A staff member defused the situation when he waved a Romanian flag out of the building with its communist emblem—the hammer and sickle—cut out of it and announced, "We are on your side!" The crowd was then let into the radio studios and ordinary people were put on the air and allowed—for the first time—to state their true feelings about the communist regime.

At 4:30 am on the 24th, shooting was heard in the street in front of the radio station, and an official announcement was made by the National Salvation Front—Romania's new government—that Ceausescu had fled the capital by helicopter. Radio Bucharest then started around the clock emergency broadcasts in the five major languages—German, Spanish, Russian, English and French—for the next several days. Dochinoiu described this time as an "exciting and hectic period...because the revolution was so sudden, but everybody wished it."

Also, around this time, members of the staff went on the air, each making his or her own apology about the lies that had been broadcast to listeners for the last 30 years. Dochinoiu stated on the air, "...that though we had to say those propaganda things about Romania, we were not spoiled in our thinking about what was right and wrong."

Reflecting on the level of blame she shares for broadcasting the former regime's propaganda, Dochinoiu remarked, "I don't feel responsible because I couldn't do anything else if I wanted to keep my job." Yet, she also recalls having an emotional conversation with her son on the same subject in early 1989. Dochinoiu's son asked her, "Why are you not doing anything? You could go on the radio and tell the truth about Romania!" She replied, "Are you sure you want to do without me? Because if I say anything, I will go to prison...that is quite clear!"

Radio Romania Today

After the revolution, many old staff members were asked to leave and



seven new announcers were added. In addition, the station changed its name to Radio Romania International.

Yet, with no law covering Radio Romania International's status, its existence was left in limbo. Dochinoiu remarked, "The parliament passed a law changing our status from government run to a public service, so our financial situation is now worse." While the mailing of QSLs has not yet been affected, budget problems have resulted in journalists answering listener's letters, which is slowing outgoing replies greatly. (The service appreciates listeners mailing IRCs or cash to help the station buy postage stamps.)

In early 1992, a crisis erupted, as the post office, which owns the antennas and transmitters of Romanian Radio and TV, raised its rental rates to a level which the service could not pay. Only an act of parliament, that granted funds for the service and placed operations under its jurisdiction, saved Radio Romania International from going off the air.

In spite of financial problems, Radio Romania International's output continues to increase. The newly revamped service has added Macedonian-Romanian (a Romanian dialect spoken in areas of former Yugoslavia), to the other 13 languages the service broadcasts. Additionally, Romania now provides more programming aimed at specific regions of the world.

Says Dochinoiu, "We kept some of our cultural programs and added many new ones. In addition to *Cultural Artistic Notebook*, *Through Bucharest along the Centuries*, and *Cultural Affairs*, the service has added new features such as *Investments In Romania* and *Economic Agenda*, which update listeners with the latest business news in the country.

While the economic changes are covered extensively, the service has also set out to provide coverage of the many new political parties and exhibitions happening throughout the country. Dochinoiu commented, "Before, our cultural ties were nothing; now they are booming ... Everything in Romania is booming today."

To obtain more information on or about the new programming or the listener's club, write to: Radio Romania International, P.O. Box 111, Bucharest, Romania.

Reflecting on her goals for the English language service, Dochinoiu commented that she is trying to provide programming that is "more

lively" and less "a numeration of facts." Additionally, she also hopes to provide, as much as possible, "diverse viewpoints" from all perspectives of Romanian society. Yet, Vasile Ionescu, the deputy director of the service, put the dramatic changes at Radio Romania International in a nutshell when he stated, "Finally, the Romanian service is in the hands of professionals, not party activists."



Hungary Radio Budapest

While many Eastern European services changed only after their country's revolution in the late 1980s, Radio Budapest pioneered its open and listener friendly style in the 1960's. This progressive style was the result of the efforts of Charles Taylor Coutts. After working in Hungarian radio for a while and then returning to his native Scotland, Coutts was asked to head Radio Budapest's English language service in 1964.

Coutts stated, "I agreed on the condition that they would allow me to lift out of the cold war style of programming...In other words, 'we are right and you are wrong' which was the style of both sides at that time." Coutts added, "Largely because I was a foreigner and because the situation was changing—as Hungary was moving toward a market economy at that time—I got away with it."

Despite some governmental resistance, Coutts continued on his goal of "introducing as objective as possible newscasts" to "show to American and English speaking listeners that despite the dictatorship and the totalitarianism, there were real live issues in Hungary that could engage people." Coutts compared Radio Budapest's broadcasts at that time to a "local radio station in Britain or in the United States, giving a day by day picture of what is happening in Hungary!"

Ironically, some of the strongest resistance to changes at the station came from Radio Budapest's listeners, who were quite left-wing on the political spectrum. Many of these listeners wrote in complaining that the service was no longer "revolutionary enough." Coutts commented, "While we lost some of the old type of listeners, we gradually built up a new type of audience between 15 and 35...interested, curious and argumentative, who took issue with us, and this is what we were looking for!"

For this type of listener, Coutts developed a number of programs centered around issues, such as abortion rights, religious freedom, consumer choice, and nuclear disarmament. To receive audience input, the service invited listeners to write to or send an audio tape to the station containing their opinions about certain topics

discussed on Radio Budapest. In turn, Radio Budapest promised that all responses sent in would be aired without any editing. Commenting on the political implications of the programming, Coutts stated, "It was a big risk that we took at the time—airing listener's opinions."

Coutts' risk paid off enormously, with a dramatic increase in listener response. The station received many letters ranging from famous scholars like John Kenneth Gailbraith to Nobel Prize winning scientists, along with the average listener. Unusual responses included one listener in the United States, who was a professor at a university in Michigan. The listener wrote in response to a series of programs about Hungary's style of economy that "Hungary does not have socialism, but a form of capitalism."

Yet, Radio Budapest's freedom did have limits, as was the case when Mary Caldor, a well known human rights activist in Great Britain, commented that the "nuclear divide could not be overcome unless there were full human rights and civil rights in Hungary." Before the program aired, high-level government officials censored the program.

In spite of a few setbacks, the style of the English service increasingly served as a catalyst that transformed the style of all language services at Radio Budapest. So progressive was Radio Budapest's style that, by the late 1980's, the international service was ahead of Hungary's domestic media in presenting critical voices about society and the government.

Greater Freedom and Problems after Communism

By late 1989, Janos Kadar, Hungary's communist leader since the 1956 revolution, was replaced and a new roundtable agreement was signed between the opposition and the government, which resulted in the establishment of a democratic republic. In 1990, the roundtable agreement, which did not contain a new media law, served to jeopardize the existence of Radio Budapest by making the external service's legal status in Hungarian society very uncertain. Coutts commented, "Some members of the opposition thought that the shortwave service was a waste of time and served no purpose." He added, "They succeeded in closing down several language sections."

Before more damage could be done, the foreign ministry stepped in to save the service. Contrary to the trend of most shortwave broadcasters, the cutbacks came in the face of increased funding for Radio Budapest. "The cutbacks were never a question of money...The budget is bigger now than under communism." Coutts added, "That is why I think they will be restored in the long run."

Today, with all content related restrictions lifted on the service, Radio Budapest has a new role. Coutts explained, "Our job is to bring to people information about life in Hungary with sympathy, but with warts and all." In fact, he added, "We make a point of covering controversial issues."

On Radio Budapest's English broadcasts, issues—ranging from racism against Gypsies and Jews to the economic problems that are plaguing this new capitalist country—are covered on a regular basis. Even on its travel magazine, *If You Come to Hungary*, usually used as a tool to promote tourism on other services, listeners can hear critical voices, such as the negative experiences of one Austrian, who had a terrible time while visiting Hungary.

New Programming

In addition to news updates, Radio Budapest's hour-long broadcasts include a variety of new features that cover the fast changing situation in the country. *The Weeklies* provides a review of the stories covered by the Hungarian press, *Magazine 90* allows 90 second music requests, *Business Partner* updates the changing business world of Hungary's economy. *What You Say* gives listeners a chance to voice their opinions about different subjects on the air, and *Across Party Lines* presents controversial issues in Hungarian political life.

Started by the late Dennis Hermer over two decades ago, *DX Corner* continues to answer questions, provide listeners with the latest short-wave news and DX reports, and runs a yearly DX competition. To obtain further information about programming, times and broadcast frequencies, write to: Radio Budapest, Brody Sandor utca 5-7, 1800-H, Budapest, Hungary.

For those who are not satisfied with just listening to what is going on in Hungary, but want to experience the sights and sounds of the country, Radio Budapest runs an annual contest in which a free trip to Hungary is awarded. Last year's contest featured a "Care for the Environment Competition," in which listeners were asked nine of the "most encouraging ways" in which Hungary is caring for the environment. It was somewhat ironic, considering the tensions caused by forty years of Russian troops being stationed in the country, that a Russian listener won the contest. A new contest should now be underway.

The new changes in Hungary have also resulted in changes to its 14-member English department at Radio Budapest. For the first time the station has an Australian staff member and many American freelancers are now contributing



announcers at Radio Budapest. Also, despite its emphasis on listener input through the years, Radio Budapest has never had an audience research department and is just now in the process of organizing one.

Once established, the new audience research department will help speed answers to the 8,000 letters the English department receives annually (most are from the United States, Canada and the U.K.). These letters provide the service with a better profile of its listeners and improve distribution of its bi-monthly magazine *Budapest International*. Coutts also announced Radio Budapest is planning to be one of the first ex-Soviet Bloc stations to go on satellite via Astro 1B and Eurosat. However, as of yet, no date has been set for the launching of the service.

The Future

Looking back on Radio Budapest's period under communism, Coutts remarked, "I only regret that we could not go further than we did with our programming." With a great transition taking place in the economic and political life of the country, Coutts and many Hungarians are excited about the dramatic changes. Coutts commented, "Hungary is a fantastic place to cover today...Today, we are trying to show the reality of democratic Hungary, how it emerged, where it is and where it may go." He added happily, "No longer are we trying to convert people around to any point of view."

The changes experienced by Eastern European broadcasters have been as sudden and dramatic as the revolutions that caused them, yet this new era of broadcasting is welcomed with anticipation. Without the drawbacks of heavy propaganda, listeners can now enjoy unique national perspectives and programming, along with the latest developments from this evolving part of the globe.

MT

Table of Contents photo: Radio Romania staff front row l-r: Dorina Miron, Aurora Barta, Ionana Masariu; Back row l-r: Diana Lesanu, Fredrica Dochinoiu, Eurgenia Chira, Alexandru Grigorescu, and Dan Balamat.

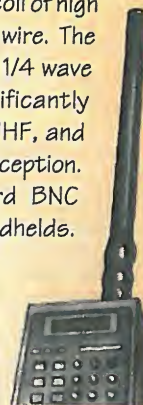
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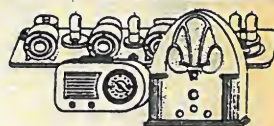
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